

Bashar Jabban Interview by Alam Arrajol

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Saudi Arabia Vision 2030, an opportunity to Italian companies...

Bashar talk about Italian Business Group (IBG) and future projects, his relation with Italy and Saudi Arabia, his personal and professional background, and his vision toward the historical challenging moment KSA and the region are passing through.

What is your personal background?

Born in Damascus and raised in Beirut, I was exposed to the Italian and European culture influence since teen, developing an artistic sensibility. My father Ibrahim was in the fashion textile business and used to bring me with him in his business trips to Italy, Switzerland, and France. My father business relations with Saudi Arabia date back to the sixties and still today it happens to me to meet Saudi businessman that remember him with esteem.

At 19, at the start of Lebanese civil war, I moved to Switzerland to continue the studies, and soon after to Como - Italy where my father had a commercial base. Afterwards, I earned a MBA in Construction from the University of Manchester.

What are your relations with Italy?

I settled in Italy in 1979, working as an entrepreneur and consultant in construction, real estate, and Information technology industries. Professional commitments often took me to Saudi Arabia, the United States, and other European countries. I obtained the Italian citizenship in the nineties, married to Alessandra Serafini and raised our two children in Italy.

And what about your relation with Saudi Arabia?

The professional relationship with Saudi Arabia continues for more than 25 years, and in 2009 I moved to Jeddah with the family. In recent years, I worked as an internal consultant in central position of relevant Saudi companies, in close contact with the local managerial reality, applying my integrated and reflective management and consultancy experience in the construction, real estate, and information technology industries, accumulated through years of work and studies at international level. I'm firmly convinced that timely controlling project results is the prerequisite to effective organization management and that lead me to design an innovative system to allow real time control to a project and to retain the control chain through the project lifecycle - resulting in cost, cashflow and service efficiencies.

How did the idea of IBG matured?

The same proactive mindset driving my professional vision lead me to co-found the Italian Business Group (IBG) in 2013, together with the then Consul General in Jeddah, dr. Simone Petroni. Italy was at that time the only between major European countries with consular office in Jeddah not counting on a business group that would support and work alongside the Consulate.

What is IBG, its mission and activities?

IBG is a non-profit association, operating under the patronage of the Italian Consulate and the JCCI, with the mission to strengthen ties of mutual interest, friendship and cultural exchange of business and professionals operating in Saudi Arabia and Italy.

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Among IBG members are primary businesses that represent famous Italian brands in the fashion, design, automotive, pharma, architecture, construction, gastronomy, etc.

With the indispensable and invaluable support of the Consul, HE Elisabetta Martini, and Italian Embassy in Riyadh, IBG liaise with other bodies and associations of the Italian network system (Sistema Italia) for the promotion of Italy's image through events and initiatives business oriented

What are future IBG projects?

In collaboration with other institutional bodies, both Italian and Saudis operating on Italian territory, IBG plans to organize short trips in specific areas of Italy, to explore a potential business, investment opportunity, exchange of industrial and manufacturing know-how.

Project in the pipeline that IBG is also working on are:

An innovative project of collaborative/ partnership Marketing that brings together, under the umbrella of "Italianity", the various local activities that have as their object the excellence of Made in Italy.

The creation of the Friends of Italy network in collaboration with IBG members.

Considering the historical challenging moment KSA and the region are passing through and the KSA 2030 vision, what is your vision for yourself and IBG?

New industry trends and the transformation process imposed by the demanding economic environment that Saudi Arabia and the region is facing require project centric organizations (such as real estate and contracting businesses) to adopt new strategies and innovative approaches to achieve efficiency and strong control on their operations and that call for talented managers, who know how to deliver a turnaround in an effective, agile, and non-invasive way. I am confident that I fit this profile.

As IBG president, I believe the National Transformation Plan and Vision 2030 is an important opportunity for the Italian companies to invest in Saudi Arabia. IBG will contribute in this direction by strengthening the flow of entrepreneurial culture, with the essential and invaluable support of our members and all Italian institutions embodied in the "Sistema Italia", primarily our Consulate in Jeddah and Riyadh Embassy.